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DAILY VARIETY

TELEVISION REVIEWS

JFK: Reckless Youth

(Sun. (21), Tues. (23), 9-11 p.m. ABC)

Filmed in Toronto by the Polone Co. in association with Hearst Entertainment. Exec producer, Judith A. Polone; producer-director, Harry Winer; writer, William Broyles; camera, Jean Lepine; editors, David Simmons, John A. Barton; production designer, Armin Ganz; sound, Bryan Day; music, Cameron Allan.

Cast: Patrick Dempsey, Terry Kinney, Loren Dean, Yolanda Jilot, Diana Scarwid, Robin Tunney, Andrew Lowrey, Stan Cahill, Claire Forlani, Malachy McCort, James Hebborn, Natalie Radford, Cedric Smith, Greg Spottiswood, Andrew Miller, Pixie Bigelow, Nikki DeBoer, Adrian Hough, Karyn Dwyer, Heidi Von Palleske, Francois Klanfer, Michael Polley, Barry Morse, Ted Follows, Kenner Ames, Jeffrey Max Nicholls, Tom Melissis, Patrick Chilvers, Jeffrey Hirschfield, Kevin Juvonville, Jason Blicher.

Reckless Youth" is a "win-nah," to borrow the mantra (and pronunciation) that is proclaimed with great frequency by patriarch Joe Kennedy (Terry Kinney) and his brood. Superb direction by Harry Winer, camerawork by Jean Lepine and production values make this miniseries a must-see, regardless of one's feelings about John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

The pic concentrates on Kennedy from age 16 to 29, ending with his first, successful run for Congress. It shows a physically frail John, rebellious and fun-loving, close to his siblings, especially Kathleen (Robin Tunney, who looks eerily like the real Kathleen), second not only in birth order but in his parents' esteem.

Pic is more positive about its subject than suggested by the title (and source work, Nigel Hamilton's controversial biography). The JFK presented here is more man than myth. He is motivated by



Patrick Dempsey, as young JFK, and Yolanda Jilot in ABC's miniseries "JFK: Reckless Youth."

idealism, not political expediency.

Patrick Dempsey, with his gangly build and shock of hair, does more than merely resemble JFK; he captures the essence of Kennedy: his wit, charm, charisma and emotional depth. One sees in Dempsey's excellent portrayal suggestions of the mature JFK, whose persona is much better known.

Other family members don't fare as well. Rose (Diana Scarwid) is seen as distant and religion-obsessed. Brother Joe Jr. (Loren Dean) is heir to more than the father's name: He is competitive and ruthlessly ambitious. Joe Sr. is portrayed as the involved parent, whose ambitions for his children are equaled only by his love.

The movie's leisurely pace is a welcome break from the fast cuts, superficial scenes and hurried feel so common in TV pix. Much time is spent on the PT 109 episode, and it is one of the highlights. Cameron Allan's music evokes both despair and hope; the scene of JFK and some of his shipmates singing gospel after being rescued is profoundly moving.

It is surprising, given the emphasis on sex in Hamilton's book, that the movie downplays it. His thesis about the roots of JFK's alleged womanizing is that Joe's own unrestrained sexual appetite served as a model for his sons.

Save for a reference to Joe passing along some pornography to a teenage JFK and friend Lem Billings (Andrew Lowrey), and a speech by Joe about marriage and sex being totally separate, the theory is given short shrift here. John is portrayed as a horny teenager and then an amorous, but serially monogamous, adult.

All cast members turn in fine performances, and tech credits are superior. —Patricia O'Connell